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ASSOCIATIONS

Targeting and Retaining Members

The Battle For Support

Pro and Anti-NEA Forces Wage Grass-Roots Campaigns

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

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FEATURES

18 The Battle For Support

Last year, opponents of the National Endowment for the Arts began a massive communications effort to convince voters and politicians that the federal agency had to be restricted in its grant-making procedures, if not discontinued altogether. Groups supporting the NEA then began their own efforts in response. Both have couched their arguments in terms designed to stimulate the public to action. This case study details how both sides are attempting to marshal public support, and in turn generate political pressure, in what has become an emotional issue.

Judith T. Phair, APR

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24 Successful Techniques to Reach, Recruit and Retain Members

Corporate America is more and more concerned with the bottom line, and getting tangible benefits from every expenditure. Therefore, associations must clearly communicate how their goals coincide with those of their members, and position themselves carefully to reach targeted prospective members. Cause-related groups also share these concerns. See how public relations and marketing professionals are working together successfully to address these concerns at several organizations.

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Cover art: *Jeanette Adams*

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Communicating values

Few issues will generate more emotional responses from the U.S. public than censorship and pornography. These two issues are major arguments being used in the public relations strategies of opponents and supporters of the National Endowment for the Arts

The financing of or support of the arts is a complex issue. The NEA, in its 25 years as a federal agency, has awarded about 85,000 grants to all types of artists. Secure in its belief that supporting art in the United States was a worthy cause, the NEA did not "make an effort to develop a broad base of support," says Jack Lichtenstein, NEA director of government affairs, in our cover story *(page 18)*.

That lack of outreach to the public has contributed in part to the NEA's current problems in what would normally be a routine process reauthorizing its existence, reports Judith T. Phair, APR. Phair, vice president for public relations, Goucher College, Towson, Maryland, and chairman of PRSA's Educational and Cultural Organizations Section, details the history of the anti-NEA efforts, launched last spring by several groups to oppose federal funding of art works they judged to be pornographic or contrary to traditional American values.

She then discusses the strategies NEA supporters have used in defense of the organization, including First Amendment freedom of speech and expression. Both groups have focused their efforts on urging people to contact their congressional representatives. The fact that this is an election year, with politicians especially sensitive to the opinions of the voters in their districts, has maximized the effectiveness of the strategies used to generate public support by groups on both sides of the issue.

Some associations are also feeling the pinch as a troubled U.S. economy and concern for the corporate bottom line have caused some organizations and people to question the value of their membership. But groups with strong and cohesive efforts to define and target potential members, and communicate their objectives and benefits to these individuals, can succeed in recruiting and retaining them. Jack E. Blake, APR, director of information, public relations department, CUNA & Affiliates, in Madison, Wisconsin, reviews strategies used by several associations that have been successful in this goal *(page 24)*.

What do you do when the head of a foreign nation announces that he's coming to visit, and you've got three weeks – or less – to prepare? This month's "Briefings" section gives you a look at the media relations preparations made by groups in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Stanford, California to get ready for the media onslaught they knew would accompany Mikhail and Raisa Gorbachev on their recent visits *(page 9)*. Also in that section, an update on a new communications technology – 900 telephone numbers – and potential uses by public relations professionals.

Judy A. Gordon, Executive Editor

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The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is an individual membership professional society of 14,983 public relations practitioners. Its major services to members include programs of Professional Development and Accreditation, an Information Center, publications, tracking of issues of national concern, and promotion of ethical practice through adherence to PRSA's "Code of Professional Standards." PRSA's mission is "To serve the public need for understanding and cooperation among its diverse interests by fostering high professional and ethical standards for all those practicing public relations."

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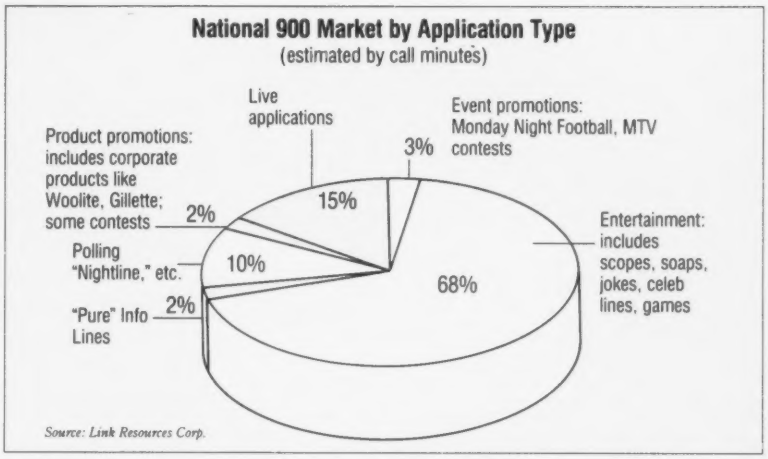
BRIEFINGS

EDITED BY ADAM SHELL

1-"900"-A-PR-TOOL?

Despite rapid growth of 900 industry, counselors express some skepticism



As part of its promotion campaign for the movie "Total Recall," Tri-Star Pictures created a game that gives callers to a 900 telephone number a chance to win $15,000, a trip to Los Angeles to meet star Arnold Schwarzenegger, and a trip to Mars, Pennsylvania. Callers are billed $2 for the first minute plus $1 for each additional minute. The purpose: to create a heightened awareness about the movie and, hopefully, generate extra revenue.

Welcome to the world of 900 pay-per-call services, the $500 million voice information services industry that allows callers to access information by simply tapping in a 900 number on a touchtone phone. The above example is just one of the many possible public relations applications of this new telecommunications technology.

"The telephone is a dynamic medium and the 900 number is yet another way to use the phone to capture billings and link up with particular promotions," says Ron Solberg, APR, principal, The Doron Alliance, a Chicago-based consulting firm specializing in technology. Solberg has spent the last few months researching 900 numbers.

Indeed, a 900 number could be used as a crisis communications tool. In the mid-'80s, Johnson & Johnson set up a 900 line during the Tylenol tampering crisis to allay public fears and provide information.

Firms could also create a crisis "insurance policy" for their clients by arranging for a 900 service company to have a number ready if a crisis does strike. Other possible uses include: fund-raising, disseminating financial information, conducting surveys and polls, promoting a special event, or offering tele-consulting services either live or via prerecorded messages.

Growth rates

Hundreds of advertisers, marketers and entrepreneurs are already capitalizing on this new technology to promote products, offset costs of other promotions or to simply make money. Many are tying 900 numbers to existing campaigns.

1989 was the beginning of a new era for 900 numbers. AT&T, MCI, Sprint Gateways and Telesphere Communications – the first carrier to offer 900 services – came out with a variety of new services. At the end of 1989 there were 55,000 new 900 lines installed.

Unlike toll-free 800 numbers, callers dialing 900 numbers must pay for their calls, which are billed directly to their monthly phone bill. Charges to 900 callers can range from 50 cents to $50, and can be billed at either a flat rate or cost per minute.

Some analysts are predicting growth rates of 40 percent over the next five years. Some say 900 numbers will become a $3 billion industry by 1994. "It's almost a billion dollar industry right now, and it will probably grow a billion a year for the next few years," says Robert Titsch, publisher of *4th Media Journal*, a magazine on interactive communications in Scottsdale, Arizona, that put out its first issue in April. Link Resources Corp., a New York-based research firm, offers a more conservative

Continued on page 14

The Gorbachev Visit: Lessons and themes in media relations

Volunteer task force plans communications program in 13 days

When the Soviet Union made the surprising announcement that President Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife would depart from the summit meeting in Washington and fly west for a visit to Minnesota, Governor Rudy Perpich, who had invited the Soviet leader to come calling, responded swiftly.

Within days of the May 14 notice, the governor selected a task force of 18 CEOs of Minnesota companies. They represented computers, food manufacturing, telecommunications, broadcasting, financial services and public relations. He called the committee together for their first meeting on Monday, May 21. The Gorbachev party was scheduled to arrive for a seven-hour stay on Sunday, June 3.

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife, Raisa, greeted Minnesotans with smiles and waves.

Task Force Chairman Roger Parkinson, publisher of the *Star Tribune* newspaper,

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Continued from page 9

projection of $1.5 billion by 1994. This estimate, though, includes only calls to 900 numbers, not revenue earned by programming companies or profits from equipment sales or promotional services.

Business uses on rise

Although entertainment uses such as sports lines, quiz games and chat lines still dominate the market, business and information applications of 900 numbers are on the rise. A law firm in California, for example, offers live counseling services via the phone. Last October following the Bay Area earthquake, KGO-TV in San Francisco used a 900 number to provide the public with earthquake updates.

> "The problem is keeping the 900 number in front of the public's eyes"

Some organizations have also begun asking sympathizers to call 900 numbers to send mailgrams and messages to their Congressional representatives. Both sides of the National Endowment for the Arts reauthorization controversy have run full-page advertisements giving these numbers. And 250,000 members of the National Rifle Association's Institute for Legislative Action recently used a 900 number to send letters opposing a ban on semiautomatic firearms to President Bush.

Obstacles to overcome

But the public relations field has been much less enthusiastic and far more skeptical about the potential public relations applications of 900 numbers. Interviews with practitioners reveal that most have invested little time or effort to find ways in which 900 numbers can benefit themselves or their clients.

Much of the trepidation is attributed to a lack of knowledge about 900 numbers. "The reason it hasn't caught on faster in the PR field is due to a lack of education," says Cory Eisner, vice president of sales/marketing for Phone Programs, Inc., New York. "It takes time to learn and understand the business and begin to accept the reality that the telephone is a legitimate medium."

But there are other problems, as well. The biggest problem, especially for practitioners who want to use a 900 number to promote their own firm, is generating the 1,000 to 2,000 monthly calls needed to cover set-up and maintenance costs – which run between $1,000 and $3,000 per month – and money needed to promote the number itself. (Note: some services have designed set-up systems that do not require the customer to pay up-front charges.)

Solberg says he scrapped the idea of selling high-tech counseling advice over the phone lines after realizing such a small niche service would not generate enough calls. "It just didn't seem practical," says Solberg. "The problem is keeping the 900 number in front of the public's eyes long enough." Michael Bayer, public relations director for Copenbarger, Anderson & Welch, an Irving-California-based law firm, decided against using a 900 number to offer legal information on tax laws and target potential clients for the same reason. To publicize the 900 number, most 900 programming companies recommend that firms include it in all their communications.

In response to the dizzying growth of the voice information services industry – including 900 numbers – a new trade magazine, "4th Media Journal," *was started up in April.*

"I don't know if PR firms have the kind of reach they would need to leverage in order to make an impression on enough people to make it," says Chris Elwell, editor of "Information Industry Bulletin," a Stamford, Connecticut-based newsletter that reports on technology and telecommunications.

Bayer also says firms in public relations, law and other professions might be making a major public relations mistake by requiring callers to pay for information, rather than just giving it away free on an 800 number. "The question is, 'Is this kind of service consistent with the image of a prestigious law firm or public relations firm?'" He adds, however, that many people are unwilling to pay for full-time counsel and, therefore, might be attracted by the convenience of being able to pick up the phone and receive professional advice.

Some practitioners expressed concern about ethical and legal questions regarding privacy. The 900 systems allow "information providers" to analyze calls and target areas based on clusters of ZIP code information. As a result, the information is also being used to create databases.

The 900 industry itself is battling image problems caused by the use of 900 lines for adult entertainment, and instances of telemarketing fraud. In an attempt to polish its image, the industry recently formed the National Association For Information Service, based in New York. "We don't want to get any more black eyes due to programs that are questionable in content or policy," says W. Brooks McCarty, chairman, who also heads Information 900 Service Corp., a New York-based company that develops 900 programs.

What's in the future?

Despite everything, the future of the 900 industry looks bright. Michelle Litsky, president of her own New York-based public relations firm that represents a 900 programming company says, "My guess is that in the near future, clients will expect their PR firms to include possible 900 applications in every business proposal."

In a few years, the 900 number phenomenon might very well be remembered in the same way the 800 numbers were when they burst on the scene. "Ten years ago you never saw anything with an 800 number on it," says Bayer. "Today, they're everywhere. I think you'll see the 900 numbers do the very same thing."–*A.S.*

National 900 Revenue Forecast

	1989	1990	1994
Total Revenues	$235M	$515M	$1.2B
% Live Revenues	30%	16%	13%
% Interactive 900	53%	64%	80%

Estimates based on "retail" value of billings to end users.

Source: Link Resources Corp.